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The March of the Seventh Reg't.

A SERMON

ON

THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD;

DELIVERED IN

St. John's Chapel, in the City of New York,

ON SUNDAY, JUNE, 9th, 1861,

BY

S. H. WESTON, D. D.,

ASSISTANT MINISTER OF TRINITY CHURCH, CHAPLAIN OF THE SEVENTH REGIMENT.

PUBLISHED BY THE ASSOCIATION OF

THE VETERANS OF THE NATIONAL GUARD.

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FRANCIS & LOUTREL,

Steam Job Printers and Manufacturing Stationers,

45 Maiden Lane, N. Y.

SERMON.

"The Lord is thy Keeper: the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand. The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in: from this time forth and even for evermore."—Psl. 121, 5 and 8 v.

It is readily conceded, even by thoughtless, irreligious men, that the Supreme Being exercises a general supervision over the affairs of this world. They can see the moving of His hand in all great events—such as the rise and fall of empires, signal blessings or calamities. But they lack the faith to discern His oversight in minor matters, and in each individual case. They readily conclude, indeed, that great men, the leaders of nations, are His instruments, but are skeptical as to the agency of obscure, humble persons. But not only is God cognizant of whole nations, but of every person in this nation; "The Lord is thy keeper" says the Psalmist. And not only does He watch over us in all the momentous and grave affairs of our life, but even seemingly the most trivial and unimportant. "The Lord

shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in." He is about our paths and about our bed, and spieth out all our ways; when we lie down in peace to take our rest, it is He only that maketh us to dwell in safety. "Thou hast covered my head in the day of battle."

My Brethren:

We propose this morning to make an application of this consoling doctrine of our text, to what has recently transpired. I have been away from you several weeks, I trust employed in the service of my Master, and in what occurred during my absence you all seem deeply interested. I am often eagerly interrogated on the events which have taken place, and make the same answers many times a day.

From the deep feeling evinced, I have ventured to presume that many of the exciting scenes through which we have passed, might prove both interesting and edifying, and not unworthy the sanctity of this holy place. Desirous of avoiding even the appearance of egotism, or indulging in what might be construed into undue eulogy on that noble body of men to which I am proud to belong, yet even at that risk, I am not willing to forego the opportunity of improving an occasion, which, I think, in a most signal manner illustrates the doctrine of our text, while at the same time I deem it every way proper to satisfy a laudable interest in the Holy Cause we all have so much at heart.

First, then, the protecting care and mercy of an overruling Providence was shown at the very commencement of the brief Campaign, for it was a campaign in the estimation of the highest military authority, and whatever diversity of opinion may exist elsewhere, the Seventh "did the State some service, and they know it."

The regiment, you remember, left New York, April the 19th, with the intention of passing through Baltimore. I believe it was known to the officers and to most of the men, though not to the public generally, that a terrible riot had just taken place at that city. In a few hours the regiment expected to arrive there, and if the faces of the soldiers looked pale as they marched down Broadway, as was remarked by friends, it was the pallor of determination, and not of fear. It was only on arriving at Philadelphia, that we learned that the communication was cut off by the destruction of bridges and the tearing up of rails, and that it would be impossible to reach Baltimore, except by marching, which would have consumed too much valuable time. And here, we religiously believe, was demonstrated the doctrine of our text, the care of an overruling Providence. The insurgent city was in a terrible ferment; exasperated to madness by what had just transpired—expecting their houses to be laid in ashes by the next body of advancing troops. Even Union men united with rebels and fanatics in the resolution to dispute our passage, to the bitter end. On the streets through

which we would have to march, every house was converted into a fortress filled with armed men, and even howitzers hoisted into the second stories to sweep the avenues with grape-shot. Under such circumstances, we should have been at their mercy, and had we attempted the passage, as would have most certainly been done had not the communication been destroyed, the regiment would have been received with a storm of fire they could but very imperfectly have returned. Had we been able then, to reach the city, the startling reports that convulsed all New York, would have proved too true, and it was no doubt in the anticipation of such a bloody catastrophe, that they originated—"the wish was father to the thought."

On the 20th, in Philadelphia, the regiment was placed in a most embarrassing position. We could not move by Baltimore; no orders could be obtained from Washington; the wires were in the possession of our enemies; and our Colonel was doubtful how to act. In this emergency a council of war was held, and it was determined to proceed by sea. Accordingly at half-past 4 P. M., we embarked on the steamer Boston, the best that could be procured, and resolved to be guided by circumstances. From this moment until our arrival at the Junction, I believe we were in constant peril, and I confess my heart bled as the young, ardent faces filed by me to take their places on board. I acknowledge I had serious misgivings as to the issue. The boat was old and small, and even in

smooth water careened so that the men had to be moved from side to side to keep her on an even keel. How so many could be crowded into such narrow quarters is still to me a mystery; and a gentleman familiar with such operations, declared to me, on our return, that he could not have conceived it possible to convey so large a body of troops with such a transport. Fortunately we had calm weather and a smooth sea, the like of which the pilot declared he had rarely seen. What would have been the result in the event of a heavy storm it is fearful to contemplate. The lower hold, filled with men, was almost unendurable; with the hatches on, it would have been a "*Black Hole.*" But "He who measureth the waters in the hollow of his hand," was our Protector and Guide.

Another danger to which we were exposed was, we had no convoy. We had to pass by hostile coasts —we had heard of the fitting out of privateers— the enemy knew we were coming, and that, cut off from the land route, we must go by sea. They would, therefore, be on the alert. We were, no doubt, under their glasses almost from the hour of leaving; and a steam tug, with a single gun, might have captured or destroyed us. One shot would have disabled our machinery, and then it would have remained either to surrender or sink. In the crowded state of our vessel, every ball that passed through her must have caused fearful loss of life.

Arriving off the mouth of the Potomac, we looked eagerly around for a man-of-war to convoy

us to Washington; nor can I yet understand how, in so fearful an emergency, such a precaution was neglected. Every boat we hailed reported every thing in the hands of the secessionists; and if the enemy meditated an attack on the Capital, it was not likely they would permit a thousand men to go to its relief, when a single gun on the banks of the river could have barred our passage. Could we have ascertained the position of the batteries, we could have, perhaps, landed, and stormed them; but it would have been an easy matter to mask them until we were under their fire, and then resistance, at the best, would have been madness. Still, under all these disadvantages, it was decided to proceed, and I retired to rest that night with the expectation of being awakened by the crash of a cannon ball through our bulwarks and the cries of wounded men.

During the night, however, it seems our course was altered, and the dawn of day disclosed the distant city of Annapolis. Even here our approach was cautious, for the city might be in the possession of the enemy, and a swift steamer lurking there, ready to dart out on its prey. But the sight of the "brave old flag" streaming from the masthead of the Constitution frigate, which the Eighth Massachusetts Regiment had towed out, as she was about to be seized by a party of rebels from Baltimore*—this flag re-assured us. Never did the Stars

* Their fathers, they said, had built her, and they were determined to preserve her.

and Stripes seem so dear to us, we never before realized how much we loved them, and at the sight there went up a cheer from our gallant men that made the welkin ring again.

The Eighth Massachusetts Regiment left Philadelphia a few hours before us, and at Havre-de-Grace had seized the steamer Maryland, and arrived in advance. In towing out the Constitution they grounded, and when we arrived, these brave men had been confined on their steamer for twenty-four hours, without food or drink; some in their agony drank salt water, and became delirious. We consumed half a day in attempting to tow them off, and were at last compelled to land our own regiment, and then send back the Boston to land the Eighth.

We found the Naval School of Annapolis in hourly expectation of an attack, as the whole country round was in possession of secessionists. But we were once more on land, where the Seventh, if attacked, could manœuvre and defend themselves, and thus were we mercifully brought by an overruling Providence, to the haven where we would be; and never did I utter a more hearty "Thanksgiving for a safe return from sea." We all realized the fulfilment of the promise, "When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee, and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee."

But in Annapolis we were yet a weary way off from our destination. Still not a word from Government—the telegraph torn down—the locomo-

tive disabled—the rails displaced—the bridges demolished—and the road reported in possession of the enemy. Our position was still critical and trying. It was the original intention to march for Washington immediately on landing, as the Capital, if not already captured, was supposed to be in great peril; and here, for a third time, there seems to have been an interposition of God in our behalf.

From what has since transpired, I have no doubt had we marched on the evening of our arrival, not more than half or two-thirds of the regiment would have reached Washington; indeed such was the opinion of the United States officers at the Academy.

Five minutes after we had landed, the officer in command of the Naval School informed me, that if we made a forced march, we might possibly carry two-thirds of our number through; the wounded, he added, we would be compelled to leave on the road, and as the enemy were not exasperated, the fallen left behind would not be maltreated; yet all declared we would meet with a warm reception. But though the men were eager, it was decided not to move that night. They were suffering from fatigue—they had been on an allowance of water—they left New York with one day's rations, and their food had been poor in quality and deficient in quantity; the road, unknown to us, was familiar to the enemy; night, a potent auxiliary, would have given him a fearful advantage. It was finally concluded on the morrow to hold Annapolis, to make it

the basis of military operations, and open the road to Washington. The rails had been torn up for miles, but the Eighth Massachusetts Regiment—a noble body of men, commanded by Gen. Butler, a brave man—commenced to lay them down and repair the engine. Intimidated by numbers, the rebels did not molest them. Late on the evening of the 23d inst., the discharge of a rocket from the Constitution, followed by the report of a cannon, gave the signal of unfriendly visitors in the Bay. The drums immediately beat to quarters, and in just seven minutes from the first tap, the Cadets, the Eighth Massachusetts and the National Guard were in line-of-battle, ready for action. It proved a false alarm, but I am convinced, from what I subsequently learned, that it saved us from molestation, if not from a battle, on our morrow's march.

The vessels proved to be friendly, loaded with troops. They came to take our place and hold the city. Accordingly on the morrow—the 24th of April—at four o'clock in the morning, before the new-comers had landed, the 6th and 2d Companies, and the Engineer Corps, marched as an advance guard, the Eighth Massachusetts followed, and at ten the main body of the National Guard moved. The morning was one of the most sultry I can remember, and the men suffered terribly, marching, as they did, on the railroad, often between high banks; not a breath of air could reach them, while the sun was intensely warm, and they loaded with heavy knapsacks.

By dark the Seventh was in advance of the Eighth, after having rebuilt a large bridge which had been destroyed. Of the sufferings of that night's march I need not speak. A shower had drenched the men and changed the atmosphere; it was cold, and the men could not march fast enough to keep themselves warm, it being necessary, every few minutes, to halt the whole body to lay rails.

Hungry, thirsty, cold, weary, in constant expectation of an attack, the Seventh toiled on without a murmur, dragging the two howitzers by hand, and as fast as the poor fellows fell from exhaustion, often insensible, they were put on the Surgeon's car, and dragged by hand also; this having become necessary, as we were now cut off from our locomotive, by a break we could not repair. Three times did I lift a soldier of the Massachusetts Regiment, after he had fallen, and at last left him on the ground, in the care of his companions; and when, at last, the dawn broke on our weary line, I could scarcely recognize my intimate friends, so pale, so haggard, and altered, did they look in the cold morning light.

Fires were now built along the line, to warm the men. The adjoining fences furnished the fuel, but the proprietor was sent for and amply remunerated, and at *war prices*. The men rummaged their knapsacks for any remaining piece of raw meat, and scoured the neighborhood for food; and under other circumstances, it would have been

amusing to see the tired soldiers drop asleep while conveying it to their mouths. Sleep was even more imperative and exacting than hunger. Resuming our march, in a short time we were at the Junction, which we found in possession of the Federal troops, and were soon on our way to Washington, by rail.

It was there I saw, and heard read, a mass of captured telegraphic despatches, in which was disclosed the plan for cutting off the Seventh, by destroying the bridges, removing the rails, and charging with cavalry through every cross road they were to pass. The plan was admirably conceived, and I afterwards learned in Washington why it was abandoned. It seems the Colonel of the body of the enemy's horse (some 500 strong) had been sent in disguise to Annapolis, to watch our movements. He was there on the eve of our march, and saw the rapid formation of the troops in order of battle, when the alarm was given to which I have before alluded. He returned and reported it was inexpedient to attack. This information I had direct from a Union man, who had fled from Maryland, and who received it from a friend, a member of the enemy's cavalry; so the information was sufficiently authentic and direct. Hence the reported destruction of the Seventh, from the Charleston papers. They reported as done, what was so well planned and confidently anticipated. The rebels may have been deterred, too, by the knowledge of masses of troops in the

rear, which had just arrived by the Baltic and other transports.

The wisdom and prudence of our delay at Annapolis were now apparent. Had the National Guard been cut to pieces, as they might have been, had we marched on the night of our arrival, not only would New York have been clothed in mourning, but a severe blow would have been given to our cause all over the land, and Washington would probably have fallen into the hands of the insurgents. Again and again was I informed by high military authority, that our Capital could have been captured by a thousand resolute men. The authorities knew not whom to trust—men sworn in and furnished with arms would desert—and the city was filled with traitors; and aside from the enemy in Virginia, there were foes in their midst sufficient to have taken possession of the place. I cannot describe to you the raptures of joy with which we were received at Washington—old men hailed us as deliverers and wept like children. They had been long looking for us, and "hope deferred had made the heart sick," but when the Seventh wheeled into Pennsylvania Avenue there was one long sigh of relief. The inhabitants felt (for the present at least) they were safe, and that night men slept soundly, who had not done so for many anxious days.

Of the importance of the march to Washington, perhaps it does not become *me* to speak; I might be a partial narrator. But sober history will as-

sign it its proper place in its future pages. The Seventh marched at a few hours' notice—marched with one day's rations—marched expecting battle—marched at a moment when the Executive arm was literally cut off from its body, the North and the West—marched when the Government were in utter ignorance of the spirit of the loyal States, and did not know whether they were to be supported or not. At this critical moment, when the seat of Government was menaced by an unscrupulous foe, they responded to the call made on them, in greater numbers of the original members than ever appeared on any gala day, at any period since their formation. Less than this I cannot say. I might say much more. I might make comparisons, but I forbear. Where all are patriotic—self-sacrificing—brave—let all petty rivalries, mean jealousies and unmanly detractions be laid, at this solemn hour, as a sacrifice on the altar of our common country. Let the only emulation be, who shall *best* serve his country. Suffice it to say, the Seventh, aided by the immortal Eighth of Massachusetts (whom the descendants of the heroes of Bunker Hill well know how to honor), to whom a word in our disparagement would be very unsafe, opened a road from the loyal States to their Capital, and, as a distinguished citizen of that State remarked to me, "broke the back-bone of secession in Maryland for ever."

Nor can I here forbear saying one word in commendation of our judicious commander. It would

have been easy for him to have incurred foolish risk—to have put his regiment in unnecessary peril—to have made daring experiments—to have furnished brilliant paragraphs for the press—to have criminally sacrificed his men, and furnished material for pictorial sheets. But he was entrusted with a higher and more important mission than to create a sensation, and minister to a morbid taste. He was to *take care that the Republic received no harm.* That "discretion is the better part of valor" has become a synonym of ridicule; but it is a great truth, and one on which, I believe, the greatest captain of this age, and the most humane too, is conducting probably his last, and we hope his most splendid, campaign. We declare then, as our deliberate opinion, that our Colonel deserves, as he has won, not only the thanks of his superiors, but also the gratitude of every father, mother, wife, child, brother and sister of the members of the National Guard.

Napoleon Buonaparte once ordered a charge, to gratify the caprice of a beautiful lady who wished to see something of War; and as he gazed on the dead—sacrificed for an idle whim—he declared he regretted that rash order more than any act of his life. When the Light Brigade—the famous six hundred—made their mad charge at Balaklava, the French, the most dashing soldiers in the world, exclaimed, as they swept by, "This is very splendid, but it is not *War*".* No, a well ordered

*"C'est tres magnifique, mais ce n'est pas la guerre."

retreat even, may be more serviceable than a barren triumph. Many a rash commander has had reason to exclaim with the ancient captain, "Alas, another such victory and I am undone." The true soldier contends not for brilliant momentary success, but for solid and lasting results. He deserves best of his country, humanity and religion, who insures success while he spares the effusion of blood.

And here we cannot refrain from noticing the mercy of Providence in the preservation of the health of the soldiers. This feature has been a matter of wonder even to medical men. At Camp Cameron for several days and nights the exposure was terrible! Our encampment was called Mount Pleasant, but for a time, this was a palpable misnomer. It rained incessantly—the weather cold—the tents were without floors—the men, without beds, were compelled to lie down (many of them drenched to the skin from being on guard) in the wet, rank clover. The hospital was soon filled with invalids, and I can only attribute their rapid recovery to their youth, spirits, temperate habits and the skill of our excellent medical staff.

When we marched into Virginia, it was in some respects still worse, though the weather was propitious. At two o'clock in the morning of May 25th we crossed the Long Bridge into Virginia. It was a sublime spectacle. The silent tramp of ten thousand men hardly aroused the sleeping inhabitants of Washington. Three thousand men moved by

me like phantoms; not a beat of the drum, not a word exchanged. The profound silence was more emphatic and expressive than the most noisy demonstration. Each man felt he was engaged in the discharge of a stern and solemn duty. Once across, the tired men threw themselves down on the grass in the dust and slept, in every conceivable position, the deep sleep of the exhausted. Many were without even their blankets, and during our stay on the other side of the Potomac, in the heavy dews, our only canopy was the heavens. On the 27th, we returned to our old camp, in a rain that drenched every man to the skin, and yet, though there were twelve hundred and thirty names on our muster-roll, we brought or sent home every man but one, alive, and nearly every one in good health. Alas, for the exception. A widowed mother and a fond young wife, mourn to-day their untimely loss; one gallant spirit that went from them buoyant with health, glowing with patriotic fire, and eager to win an honorable name in the service of his beloved land. But let them be comforted. He fell in the discharge of his duty; his memory is embalmed in the hearts of his comrades that loved him so well: and it is sweet to die for ourcountry.

Lastly.—There is one other feature to be noticed which illustrates our text, viz: the religious interest which was awakened. On board the Boston, on the first Sunday, we had the full service of the Church and a sermon; the music, conducted by a member of the congregation of St. John's chapel,

was excellent; as it was, indeed, throughout our entire absence. At Annapolis several hundred Testaments (containing the Psalms,) were distributed. They were eagerly sought for, and there were not enough to supply the applicants.

It was at once touching and gratifying to observe, during a halt, the men reading their Testaments, in some instances by single individuals, in others, groups listening with the most marked attention; and no doubt many a fervent prayer was offered up in silence by the weary soldiers, for danger makes men grave and serious, and they no doubt realized that loved ones at home were praying also. I have since learned that friends, comprehending their danger, would meet and send mutual messages to their dear ones, that they might never see more; for we expected to meet the enemy in full force at the Junction, and on the march I was assured by a Union man of the neighborhood, that he knew from personal knowledge, three thousand men with cannon were awaiting our coming.

At Washington several hundred additional Testaments arrived, and were at once called for. I also wrote to New York for five hundred Prayer-Books, which were kindly donated and forwarded by Mr. Butler. A clergyman in Washington also gave a large number, and yet there were not enough to satisfy the demand. On the fly-leaf of these books I wrote, by request, the names of the possessors, with my own; the date, the place, etc., and you may be sure I was kept busy. Many had

brought their Prayer-Books and Bibles with them, but all were anxious to possess another, as a memento of the campaign. One father sent five sons to the war, all in one company ; each applied for a Prayer-Book, and two additional ones for their parents at home. The second service was held in the Capitol, and the attendance as usual was large, though the men were worn out by fatigue.

At Camp Cameron service was held every Sunday, in the open air, though the daily duties of the camp (which were severe) were never omitted. What with drill, guard duty, cooking, and attending service, the men were kept sufficiently busy. The last Sunday was spent in Virginia, though we had expected to be back at our old camp. Indeed, it was not until the last moment that I learned to the contrary, and therefore had made no preparation. Our Colonel thought it inexpedient to have service, as guard mounting and sending details to the trenches, together with the possibility of an attack, threatened to interfere; but he kindly left it to my discretion. We began, therefore, prepared to leave off at a moment's notice. The service and sermon were necessarily short, but we were not interrupted, and at the close, the men went with alacrity to work in the trenches, many of them without their dinners. They justly thought it no violation of Sunday. To dig they were not ashamed, and felt that, under the circumstances, they were serving God as acceptably as in prayer and praise; and if they

brought back no bullet or bayonet wounds, their scarred hands showed that they had done good service with spade and pick. Indeed, throughout the entire period, the behaviour of the regiment was creditable to them, as gentlemen, soldiers and Christians. The trials and dangers through which they have passed I am sure have chastened their hearts, made them wiser and better men, and produced impressions that will not soon be effaced; and, indeed, many came to me, and declared they should never forget them. If never before, they now realize what it is to pray in earnest.

Brethren, how this unnatural contest is to end, Omniscience only knows; unless He interferes to overrule the wrath of man, it threatens to be one of the most disastrous in the annals of time. But we have put our hand to the plough and cannot look back. We hope the Government will adopt no narrow or mercenary policy, and accept no dishonorable compromise. The people are ready to do their part, and such a remarkable and unexampled unanimity of sentiment in the North and West, under the circumstances, seems like an augury from God, and an earnest of success. We can afford to expend one hundred—nay, one thousand millions, if need be. A grateful posterity will cheerfully pay the debt. A vigorous display of our resources and courage now, may be economical in the end, and save us from long internal dissensions and a future foreign war. Let us stop at no proper sacrifice of money or men, or regard

any peril too imminent, or sacrifice too great, to accomplish this glorious result.

We have for long years been enjoying the benefits of our fathers' toils and sufferings. Let us resolve to bequeath to posterity a similar legacy. We believe God is on our side, and it is a great consolation to know that our great captain (whom may Heaven preserve) purposes, so far as possible, to make it a humane war. But under any circumstances war is a fearful evil—civil war, doubly so. Let us endeavor, therefore, to banish, as far as possible, all private hate and personal animosity; and while we aim to chastise our mistaken foes, let it be like the correction by a loving parent of an erring child—more in sorrow than in anger—ever praying God to give them repentance and better minds. AMEN.

COLLECTS.

O MOST powerful and glorious Lord God, the Lord of Hosts, that rulest and commandest all things: Thou sittest in the throne judging right, and therefore we make our appeal to Thy Divine Majesty, in this our trouble, that Thou wouldst take the cause into Thine own hand. Stir up Thy strength, O Lord, and come and help us. Save and defend our country in this its hour of peril. Revive in all hearts a spirit of devotion to the public good. Let Thy Divine Protection and Guidance be over all who serve in Council or in the Field, and so rule their hearts and strengthen their hands that they may preserve to us the goodly Heritage which Thou gavest to our Fathers. Mercifully forgive the grevious sins which have drawn Thy judgments upon us. Help us to look to Thee in all our troubles and adversities, and at last to rejoice in the greatness of Thy Salvation, through the merits and mediation of our blessed Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

O ETERNAL GOD and Heavenly Father, the Aid of all who need, the Helper of all who flee to Thee for succor: We commend to Thy Almighty Protection all those Thy servants now

gone forth in our defence, for whose preservation amid the perils of war our prayers are desired. Guard them we beseech Thee, from the dangers that beset their way, from sickness, from the violence of enemies, and from every evil to which they may be exposed. Give them comfort and sure confidence in Thee; and of Thy great goodness restore them to us in due time, in peace and safety, with a grateful sense of Thy mercy, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. *Amen.*

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